

## Interview

# Gerald McCarthy, Executive Director Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE)

*The Virginia Environmental Endowment is one of the many environmental foundations whose projects have benefited from NELC Clean Water Act litigation.*

**NELC:** How was your organization started?

**Gerald McCarthy:** The Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE) was created back in 1977 from the federal court case *U.S. v. Allied Chemical Company*. The company was sued for dumping the insecticide Kepone into the James River in Virginia.

The settlement was supposed to go to the U.S. Treasury, but instead Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. encouraged Allied to develop a way for the funds to be used to benefit Virginians.

As a result, the company proposed that it make a payment of \$8 million to start an environmental fund for Virginia, and Judge Merhige responded favorably to this suggestion.

This was the first time that this was ever done in any pollution lawsuit, and it set a precedent.

Since that time VEE has received approximately \$1.5 million from five other cases, including a 1990 NELC lawsuit against the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corporation.

Today we award grants to the geographic areas of Virginia, West Virginia,

Kentucky, Ohio and Maryland.

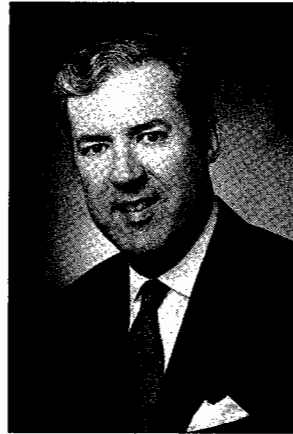
**NELC:** What projects have you funded from the penalty paid by Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel?

**GM:** The consent decree imposed a \$700,000 penalty, \$200,000 of which was directed to VEE to fund and administer environmental protection and education grants to benefit the Martins Ferry, Ohio region of the Ohio River, the area that was affected by the company's pollution. VEE wanted to aid the Martins Ferry School System in fostering environmental literacy.

Basically, the school system lacked any curriculum in environmental education. Our grant established "Project Ohio River Education" (O.R.E.), an integrated K-12 aquatic education program. Its goal is to increase involvement of teachers, students and community members in protecting and preserving the Ohio River.

**NELC:** How will the grant aid the Martins Ferry Schools in accomplishing this goal?

**GM:** So far the School District has been able to institute a curriculum which includes a stream monitoring model adapted from the Izaak Walton League's Save our Streams (SOS) program. The District has also provided field training workshops for teachers in the SOS program, and has



(photo: Dementi-Foster Studios)

purchased microscopes, aquariums and scientific test kits for classroom, laboratory and field study use. Project O.R.E. has also been incorporated into several science, health, English, art, special education, and government classes this year.

**NELC:** How does this project benefit the region?

**GM:** Our staff will continue to work with the Project O.R.E. staff with a special emphasis on building partnerships with local industries, public agencies, colleges, technical centers, and civic organizations in the Martins Ferry region.

Martins Ferry City Schools will be encouraged to offer advanced education and career training, and promote community partnerships that will enable students to apply aquatic studies to real-life practice. So in addition to improving the environment, Project O.R.E. also benefits the community. ♦

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For more information about the Virginia Environmental Endowment, contact them directly at 1051 East Cary Street, P.O. Box 790, Richmond, Virginia 23206, (804) 644-5000.